

Body Art.... what you need to know !

Today's body art includes tattooing, permanent cosmetics, and piercing the many different areas of the body. Branding, scarification, and 3-D implants are techniques of body art often very unfamiliar to the general public, but are now becoming a part of mainstream society. Using your body as a canvas for self expression is a personal decision. The decision to tattoo, pierce, brand or scar your body can have serious, undesirable and unexpected complications. Injuries, infections, and occasional disease transmissions, such as tetanus, hepatitis B or C, tuberculosis, syphilis, HIV, or blood infections (sepsis) can occur as a result of improperly placed body art and inappropriate aftercare procedures. *Before you decide to have any body art, make sure all immunizations are up to date.*

What You Need to Know ...

Tattoo businesses are permitted and inspected by the Louisville Metro Department of Public Health and Wellness, Division of Environmental Health and Protection. Tattoo artists must have a registration and a certificate of sanitation from the Division. Tattoo artists should know and practice universal precautions. They should practice good personal hygiene. They should use properly sterilized equipment, and use pre-sterilized single-use needles. These practices are all signs of a professional tattoo artist. Record keeping by the establishment and printed instructions for aftercare of your tattoo are also required. Always discuss the risks and possible problems from the tattooing procedure.

Permanent cosmetic application is similar to tattooing but is not regulated. Permanent cosmetics are often used on lips, cheeks, eyebrows and eyelids. When choosing a body artist to apply permanent cosmetics, look for the same standards that are required of a tattoo artist. Aftercare instructions for the permanent cosmetics should also be available.

Body Piercing businesses are regulated and inspected by the Division. They can be found throughout the Louisville Metro Community. It is important to select a professional body piercer that works in a clean, sanitary establishment. The body piercer should know and practice universal precautions. Only pre-sterilized single-use needles should be used during the piercing procedure. Piercings of the ears, tongue, nose, navel, nipples, genitalia and other body areas require the "right" jewelry. Each of the different pierced parts of the body require specific aftercare guidelines. Newer types of piercing include "pocketing" and "stapling". Jewelry that is too heavy, too thin in diameter, or too small can actually migrate and/or be rejected by the body. The "wrong" jewelry and inappropriate aftercare can lead to infection, abscesses, cysts, and keloids. Earlobe or nipple piercings are often where abscesses may form. Infectious fluid can be trapped behind or under the piercing, causing serious complications. If a piercing is infected, contact a physician. Cysts, which are fluid filled swellings, are more common in piercings in the inner cartilage of the ear, eyebrow and nose. Keloids, (excess growth of scar tissue) can develop in piercings in the nipple, ear cartilage, navel, tongue and genitals. Keloids usually form from friction caused by too tight or too heavy clothing rubbing against the pierced area. Many piercings require 4 to 8 weeks to heal. Piercings below the neck may require 2 to 8 months and navel piercings may require even longer to heal.

Branding, scarification, and cutting, are techniques of body art gaining popularity. Years ago these techniques were used by some people and tribes to identify their group. Branding is a means of marking or scarring the skin permanently by burning. Branding can be performed with a cauterizing pen or by the strike method which is using a red hot piece of metal shaped into a design. Brandings often spread when they heal, so it is important to define the size of the design. Also, each person's skin heals differently. On some, a brand will produce a raised scar with sensitive, soft texture, while on others, the effect may be more of a flat, sharp, light-colored design. Scarification and cutting is similar to tattooing in that the skin is permanently marked by cutting it, but without the use of pigments. Basically, the deeper the cut, the better the chance that the skin will scar. The cuts must penetrate the dermis in order to produce a fine, permanent scar. Injection scarification uses the injection of rubbing alcohol or other fluids under the skin which then blisters to produce the scarring. Results can be uncontrollable and dangerous. Also known as "etching" by some artists, tattoo gun scarification works by over-tattooing an area using either nothing or a slightly abrasive formula. This ground up skin then heals to leave a relatively faint but well detailed scar. As with branding, even scarification and cutting, produces a wide range of results. Different skins heal different colors; white, black, pink or red. The scar or cut design can heal raised or even with the skin, or form keloids. Body modification techniques are not regulated, so you should check for a clean, sanitary work area. Ask if the body artist follows universal precautions and sterilizes equipment used during the procedures. Look for good personal hygienic practices and more importantly, discuss risks, complications and aftercare.

Implants, body suspension, amputation and trepanation are the newest trends for body art. Implants involve putting surgical steel designs under the skin. The skin heals over the implant. Body suspension is usually performed at body art conferences or parties and is not a widespread activity in our community. Amputation and trepanation are also not widespread in our community. All of these forms of body art should be done at a medical facility, but rarely are, which is why they are not without risk to your health!

Always seek professional medical advice

if the body art you have received causes you any health problems!

Report complaints concerning sanitation or other suspicious practices at the body art business, to the Division of Environmental Health and Protection at (502) 574 - 6650.